

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 October 2015

## Twenty-four-hour strike by Belgian rail staff

Belgian rail workers held a one-day strike October 9, bringing the network to a virtual standstill. International trains through to Britain and France were hit.

The strike was organised by the rail union CGSP against plans by the national rail operator SNCB to push through reforms that would lead to thousands of job losses. Strikers occupied the tracks connecting two of the busiest stations in the Belgian capital of Brussels as part of their protest.

## Strike at London light railway

Staff providing security and cleaning services for the London Docklands Light Railway system (LDR) began a 48-hour strike on October 16 at 5 a.m.

The workers have been involved in a long-running dispute over wages and conditions. They are employed by the Interserve Company and are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

The LDR operates in East London, including the Canary Wharf financial district. According to Interserve, some 280,000 people use the DLR each day.

## UK Virgin East Coast rail staff balloted

A ballot for strike action of around 1,400 staff working for the Virgin East Coast company began on Monday. The ballot was called by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

The ballot is in support of an Edinburgh-based customer service assistant, who was sacked after a Kindle device went missing on a train he was working.

The RMT claims the disciplinary process carried through by Virgin management was “deeply compromised.”

## Scottish ambulance staff to be balloted

Some 1,200 Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) workers are to be balloted for strike action. The ballot by the GMB union is in response to excessive demands put on ambulance staff. The union represents paramedics, control room staff and care assistants.

The issues include rising levels of stress, meal breaks having to be missed because of increased demand, and longer working hours. The workers want additional staff to be recruited.

## Strike of London borough traffic wardens suspended

A five-day strike, due this week, by 30 traffic wardens in the London borough of Hackney has been suspended.

The wardens are employed by the private company APCOA Hackney, under contract from Hackney Council. The dispute was called because staff were not receiving the London Living Wage (LLW) of £9.15 an hour, even though the company claimed it paid the amount.

Around 40 percent of the staff were not receiving the LLW because the company was including a target bonus in its calculation of the wage.

The wardens who voted unanimously to strike are in the Unite union. In August, they held a two-day strike over the same issue. The strike was suspended after the company agreed to pay all staff the LLW.

Other issues in the dispute were the lack of paid sick scheme by the company and its refusal to increase its 1.5 percent pay offer. Unite and APCOA agreed to hold talks on the unresolved issues, under the auspices of ACAS, the government mediation service.

## Work to rule by Irish nurses

Irish nurses in the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO), working in the emergency department at St Vincent's University Hospital in Dublin, began a work to rule Monday. Around 100 staff held a lunchtime protest outside the hospital.

They are protesting persistent overcrowding of the emergency unit. According to the INMO, the unit regularly has to deal with 100 patients, yet is only designed to deal with 18. They are also protesting the hospital's inability to retain staff.

Nurses refused to carry out clerical duties, to use computers and non-emergency phones and to carry out other non-nursing duties. The hospital is one of the biggest in the country.

## Rally by Belarusian trade unions

After being denied permission to hold a rally to commemorate World Day for Decent Work for several years, Belarusian unions were allowed to

do so this year in Minsk on October 7.

Organisations taking part included the Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers' Union and the Free Metalworkers' Union. Under a decree issued in 1999, the majority of workers in Belarus have had to endure precarious employment conditions, being forced onto fixed-term contracts of between one and three years.

### **Days of action and general strike planned in Greece**

PAME, the Stalinist Greek Communist Party-aligned trade union body, is to hold demonstrations in cities and towns nationwide October 22. The union said it was preparing for a general strike on November 12.

The demonstrations and planned strike are in opposition to the Syriza government's imposition of huge spending cuts, as part of the third austerity memorandum. The first part of the austerity programme, including pension cuts, privatisations and cuts in social security payments, is due to be passed in parliament this week.

### **Protest by Turkish construction workers**

A group of 15 construction workers working on a hospital site in the city of Izmir on the Aegean coast held a protest October 16.

They are opposing the nonpayment of their wages by a subcontractor.

Some climbed to the top of a six-storey building being constructed and threatened to jump off unless their wage arrears were paid. Three others climbed a crane on site, threatening to jump off. After five hours, the construction employees were talked down.

### **Nationwide demonstration of Iranian teachers**

Iranian teachers held countrywide protests in Iran on October 8, including in the capital, Tehran. Protests took place outside education ministry and governors' offices. They were held to oppose Islamic fundamentalist policies that target teachers.

In August, the Ministry of Education admitted that more than a thousand teachers were being held in prison.

### **Strike of South African coal miners called off**

The National Union of Miners (NUM) has called off its one-week strike at the Witbank coal hub in South Africa.

The NUM agreed to a deal with the African Chamber of Mines (SACM), avoiding potential coal shortage blackouts in the country's electricity supply. The union originally put in a demand for a R3000 (US\$214) monthly increase for the lowest paid workers.

The deal was concluded with a two-year settlement. The first year consists of a monthly pay rise of R750 (US\$56) to R1000 (US\$74) for low-paid workers and a 7.5 percent pay increase in the second year.

Better-paid workers got an average of between 5 and 7 percent over the two years. The settlement on a Chamber of Mines-wide deal did not cover

housing allowance and living-out allowance.

The SACM said an agreement on these allowances would be settled by individual mining companies.

### **Strike at Kenyan hospital over nonpayment of wages**

Staff at the Kiambu county hospital in Kenya struck on Monday to protest the nonpayment of their September salaries.

The strike follows previous demonstrations against nonpayment of their August salaries. Level-four health workers say they will not be returning to work until their wages are paid.

### **Striking Swazi textile workers attacked by police**

Swaziland textile workers on strike since October 7 were attacked by police using live rounds and tear gas this week. The police intervened at the Zheng Yong Garment factory in Nhlangano to back up factory security staff.

Security staff had viciously assaulted a worker who confronted a guard over missing money. Several guards attacked the worker, putting him in hospital.

Management called the police, as they feared that the 2,000 workers outside the factory coming to the defence of their battered associate would overcome the security staff.

The intervention of armed police into industrial disputes in Swaziland is now routine. Swaziland is in the top 10 of countries in the world for the bad treatment of workers, according to the International Trade Union Federation.

### **Nigerian oil workers strike in response to police attack**

Gas and oil workers have stopped work in Nigeria, in response to violent police action against a picket line.

Members of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) withdrew their labour Tuesday.

The unions accuse the Rivers State police of injuring their members picketing outside Weather Fold Nigeria Limited, in Port Harcourt. The picket line had been set up in a campaign against the unlawful sacking of union members. The attack took place on Monday at 3 a.m. and left four pickets critically injured.

### **Nigerian oil staff barricade employer**

Oil workers employed by a Shell Petroleum Development Company subsidiary barricaded the offices of Gabson Industrial Services (GIS).

The contract workers are protesting the nonpayment of wages for nine months. GIS claims that Shell's Offshore Pipelines International, responsible for the Yokri contract in the Delta State, has not paid them.

Oil workers say they have attempted to speak to all of the employers but

their attempts have been ignored.



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